



TRIBALS OF WESTERN ODISHA: A STUDY OF SOCIO-RELIGIOUS LIFE

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Abstract:

The culture of Odisha has been throughout nourished and nurtured by the tribal tradition from ancient times. The cult and culture of Lord Jagannath which forms the core of the Odisha civilization, which stands out for its uniqueness in the whole world had its humble origin in a tribal society. The social and religious life of Western Odisha has been considerably shaped and influenced by tribal tradition. The life style of the tribals is also colourful that music and dance form a part of their day-to-day life style. They live to sing and sing to live. Their culture encompasses the collection and divorce custom and tradition of art, life style and religious that have been practiced and maintained by the numerous tribal groups of Western Odisha since pre-history. As many as sixty-two tribal groups of which about thirteen are identified as primitive. These tribal populations are concentrated in many parts of Western Odisha i.e. the undivided district of Kalahandi, Sundargarh, Sambalpur, Bolangir and Boudh. God-fearing people worship numbers of God and Goddess and observe many festivals and rituals i.e. Chait parab, Solapuja and Karamsani etc.

Keywords:

Aboriginal, Dialect, Rituals, Sacrifice, Tribe.

1-INTRODUCTION

The tribals constitute a major segment in the population map of Odisha. Geographically Odisha can be divided into two parts, the coastal plains and the hilly region, which lies to the Western Odisha. The alluvial plains along the coast had been the home of settled population. While the hilly region was the home of aboriginal tribes. Even now Odisha is a highly tribal populated state with as many as 62 types. The tribes constitute 22.21% of the state's population. The tribes influence the history and culture of the state to a very great extent. There are good grounds to believe Odishan culture, which developed in a broader Indian framework, have assimilated folk and tribal culture elements all along its very long history. The supreme God of the Hindus, Lord Jagannath had been the God of the Savara or Saoras. Jagannath culture is an embodiment of social equality a tolerance the tribal societies of Odisha possess deep senses of equality and tolerance towards others.

2-Need of the Study

The Western Odisha occupies a unique position in the tribal map of Western Odisha for having the largest varieties of tribal groups with the concentration of tribal population. Western Odisha consists of the districts comprise Bargarh, Balangir, Boudh, Deogarh, Jharsuguda, Kalahandi, Nuapada, Sambalpur, Sonepur, Sundargarh and Athamallik sub division of Angul district and it is situated between 19° 3' and 22° 11' North Latitude and between 82° 20' East and 85° 20' longitude.¹ The way of life of tribal people is based on sustainable use of local ecosystem. The tribal population is found in almost all parts of Odisha. It is also the largest tribal state in the country with as many as 62 types of Odisha are known as Adivasi, Vanabasi, Girijana and Aboriginal out of which 44 types of tribes inhabit in Western Odisha.² Out of these 62 types 13 belong to primitive people and the government of Odisha has also taken care of some eradication. Each tribe has a distinctive style of life. Considering the general socio-cultural and economic characteristics they can be broadly divided into (1) Hunters and Food gatherers (2) Pastoralists (3) Shifting Cultivator (4) Artisans (5) Horticulturists (6) Settled Cultivators and (7) Industrial Workers.³ On the basis of the economic development and socio-cultural distinctiveness they can be divided into primate groups, tribes in transition and the cultured communities. The aboriginal races or the tribals of Western Odisha consisting chiefly of Bhuinya, Binjhal, Goud, Kharia, Kandha, Kissan, Kolha and Munda lived in the

remote jungles. Some cultivated patches of land on the hill sides Others grazed herds of cattle and buffaloes in the forest. Some other tribals dived hunting. They were patient injured to suffering and naturally faithful. But the most universal features in their character were their shyness confirmed dislike of any settled occupation. Their poverty was extreme and they had little contact with the villagers of the plain and carried on their own simple transactions with each other by barter. There was no effective desire among them for the most demantary education. Amidst such a population, separated from the main stream with their settlements in the sense forest or on steep mountains, the difficulties of pionecing education were extreme. Even when the aboriginals began to hill with the Hindu population and adopted the Hindu customs the difficulty of educating them dismished only in degree and not in kind.

3- Review of Related Literature:-

The literature related to the study tribes and serious threst to their culture in Western Odisha. There are many studies in Odisha, aboard highlighting the tribal culture in western Odisha. Since the age of Ramayan and Mahabharat, the tribal of the area occupy a putative rule. The tribal sings and dance while they practices rituals, ceremonies and observe festivals in the different part of Western Odisha. This brough on folk literature away in the dim past. Certain mystic poems were composed, these are *Karamsani*, *Dalkhai*, *Sulaswang*, *Dhemsas*, *Chang*, *Dhap*, *Ghumar* composed by village authors. Very little work has so far been attempted on tribals of Western Odisha and socio-cultural life in particular- Dr Mahendra Kumar Mishra's(1992) work, Tribal folk literature of Western Odisha. Sita Kanta Mahapatra's (1993) work, The Tangled Web; The tribal life and culture of Odisha, Rebind Mohan Senapati's (2006), Odishar Adivasi (Odia) Tribal Education in Orissa un the context of Education for all by 2000 A.D(1994), published by govt. of Odisha, Tribal welfare Department,BBSR and growth of Education and social consciousness (2018) by Dr.A.Behera has also not mention in their works about culture of Western Odisha. So, Our Study on 'Tribal of Western Odisha' A Study of socio- cultural life and will be propose to attempta systematic codification of the efforts made for the development and historical analysis of its impact on society.

4- Tribes and their cultures in Western Odisha:-

The social, cultural and religions life of Western Odisha has been considerable shaped and influenced by tribal traditions. The life- style of the tribals is also colourful that music and done form a part of their day-to-day life. They live to sing and sing to live. The 62 types of tribals living in 30 districts speck in dialect in Odisha⁴ They are called is Scheduled Tribes in Western Odisha undivided district like Kalahandi 46 types, 44 types in Sambalpur , Sundargarh 40 types and Bolangir of tribal inhaled in different location.⁵ There are 8 tribes belong to particularly 44 inerrable tribal group declared by government of India. There are 13 Scheduled Tribes belong to particularly 44 inerrable Tribal Groups. Few tribes of Western Odisha have been influenced by outside tradition but most of the tribes has taken great care that they return their old custom, rituals , art, craft, song and festivals are the most visible from of their culture. There culture encompasses the collective and divorce custom and tradition of art, life style and religion that have been practiced and maintained by the numerous tribal groups of Western Odisha since pre-history. These tribal populations are concentrated in many parts of Western Odisha i.e Kalahandi, Sundargarh, Sambalpur, Jharsuguda, Nuapada, Bolangir, Sonepur,Boudh. God fearing people worship number of God and Goddess and observe many festivals and rituals i.e *Chait Parab*, *Salapuja*, *Karamsani* etc. They are very much dependent on forest for their day-to-day needs. I describe about few selected tribes and their culture in Western Odisha.

5-The Gonds:-

In Western Odisha, Gond families are long established and their numbers and the positions still held by some of them indicate that they were very influential in this part of the country. They are chiefly concentrated in the Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh area formerly known as Gandwana.⁶

The Gonds are the most renowned of all the Dravidian tribes if many be of some interest to trace their history. A large number of Zamindars, which were granted to them for rendering military service. When Chauhans got possession of Sambalpur they acknowledged the Zamindaris because loyal supporters of the Chauhan Rajas of Sambalpur.⁷ Many of the Gond ex-Zamindars of Western Odisha trace even today their ancestry from the Garmandal Raj. Gond stock this tradition was maintained during the Gond rule in Sambalpur. These are two main divisions, Raj Gond who form the aristocracy and Dhur or Dust Gonds who are the common people. The Raj Gonds man be taken to be the descendants of Gonds landed proprietors, who have been formed into a separate group and admitted to Hinduism with the status of a cultivating caste, Brahmins taking water from them. Many Raj Gonds were the Sacred thread like the Brahmins.

6-The Kondha tribes:-

Kondha are the famous in history for their meriah (human sacrifices). At the present the Kondha are identified as *Desia Kondh*, *Dungia Kondhs* are found in the different parts of Western Odisha. They speak *Kue* language and use ornament of gold and silver and they also use colour beads, Kondh are religious nature. They too offer pray prayers to their ancestors and observe a number of ceremonies in order to please the gods and ancestors by offering sacrifice.⁸ Of all goddess and gods, the goddess earth as most important. The Kondha ware also worship 84 God and Goddess. The Chief God is 'Dharma Debata'. She is known as Tanapenu. She represent by a rectangular wood or stone. They had no caste system but they maintain a social distance by an observance called 'Bisa'. Kondhs in Western Odisha celebrated three festivals in the namely Semijatra, Mahna Jatra and Chouldhua jatra.⁹ Bhima Bhoi was a blind saint, poet and philosopher who belong to the Kondh tribes. He was born on 1850 AD at Rairakhol of Sambalpur district and died on 1895, at Khaliapali of Sonepur district. He could compose poems extempore. Though blind and deprived of education, he composed verses which reveal high philosophical thoughts and divines' inspiration. Bhima Bhoi's literary creation always carried a special message for the exploited people of Odisha and he attempted through their pages as much as through his field work to instil a new faith in them. Some of his works echoed his mutinous voice against the social set up. He laid bare the superstition that had

polluted the entire social atmosphere and had emasculated the people of Western Odisha and laid stress on a fresh and free national life. Even he could sing the song the eternal sacrifice. His following poems become would famous and inscribed on the wall of United Nations Organisation Hall.¹⁰

“Pranink Arata Dukha Apramita Dekhu Dekhu Keba Sahu

Mo Jiban Pachhe Narke Padhi Thau Jagat Udhar Heu”

(Witnessing the plethora of plights on earth now one could bear with ; Let my soul go to the hell but let the world saved)

7- The Khadia Tribes:-

The three sections of the tribes lie at three diverse stage of economic scale. The hill Khadia handles to life on the food gathering and hunting the dalkhi Khadia on agricultural work and the Doudh Khadia on cattle agricultural. Commonly Khadia women make mats. There are three important rituals and ceremonies observe by the Kharia relating to the birth, marriage and death(ear boring, hair tying and sika). Ceremonies during the first pregnancy called ‘Dorhojodum’ observe by Kharia and they worship the deities of Nag Deo, Jal Deo, Grama Deo, Fair God etc.¹¹

8- The Kishan:-

They are shifting cultivator and food gather but at the present, they have adopted paddy cultivation. Most probably they were labourer and agriculture workers. The most important festivals i.e Phagu Parab, Sahul, Pusha Parab, Observe the Kishan tribe. The Kishan religion on reveals their value in soul, super human power. The believe that all living and non-living thing hold super human control.¹²

9-The Mirdha:-

The Mirdha is a small Dravidian tribe found in the district of Bargarh, Deogarh, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Balangir and Sonepur. Mirdha is generally referred to as kuda meaning and each digger. The Mirdhas speak kun boli, which is the dialect of the kissans.¹³

The main occupation of the tribe is digging earth and other works in groups. The headman is generally called Mirdha. In course of time the whole tribe is known as Mirdha or Kunnar as is called is their mother tongue.¹⁴ Mirdha are divided into two group, i.e bad kuda or kunhar and Sankuda or San Kunhar. They have many similarities with the kissans and many believed to be a section of kisan tribe.

10- The Munda Tribe:-

They were hunters and wanders and now they have adopted cultivation. They are famous in Odisha for their basket work and wearing. The culture of Munda people is a blend of Sarnaism and Christian cultures. The Munda people have a rich range of folk songs, dances and as well as musical instrument. They observe seasonel festival of Karan, Sarhul, Sorai etc. Indigenous Munda follows Sarnassm and sarnaism reveals the belief in a god called ‘Singbong’.¹⁵

11-The Soura Tribes:-

Soura famous for their painting in history. They are dewinding jungle tribe and practiced shifting cultivation. They worshiped lord Narsimha, Jhankardevata and large number of deities and spirit.¹⁶

12-The Santal Tribes:-

The Santal are fulfil their basic needs from forest and now they are engaged in hunting, fishing and migrating to industrial area. Dance is the important parts of their fairs and festivals. They also follows Sourma religion and celebrated baba bang, sorai, karma etc.¹⁷ Apart from these tribes Oram, Kalha, Binjhal, Kuda and others are found in the different parts of Western Odisha.

13- Tribal Economy and Culture:-

The livelihood of traditional tribal depends on the forest and land based economy and seasonal cultural practices are linked with this economy. The non- timer forest produces (NTEP)is the secondary source of live hood which supplements food during the food security. In case social, economic and political position they are lower than other communities in terms of accessing possession of goods and commodities. Therefore, the importance of the need of livelihood generating activities based of locality available resources is very essential that could provide sustainable development to the tribal community and preserve cultural behaviour. This is what the ministry of Tribal affair has taken steps to establish organisation to take up marketing development activities of NTFP on which they may take few time for their in-come generation.¹⁸ The establishment of TRIFED (Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India limited) is an important agency to boost up tribal to increase socio-economic status. The aim of TRIFED is to serve the interest of the tribal community and work for their socio-economic development.¹⁹ Tribal dialect, ritual practices , belief system, custom and tradition are all important aspect of tribal culture and placed in unique position in the Indian society and culture.

The Wide spread of modern technical, professional education as well as impact of Western education and culture have changed the traditional, cultural practices in urban, semi-urban and industrial social Milieu. Besides these, there is an impact of religion that have changed tribal attitude on behalf system. The tribal way of life is some-how far different from the traditional way of life in those environment .The cultural identity of tribal is about to be disappeared in the Urban, Semi-Urban, Industrial environment. There are other factors for too responsible for the changing of tribal cultural the factors are as such, rapid industrialization, urbanisation, western education and mega development projects and displacement etc.

14- Conclusion:-

However, on the account of the about discussion the tribal people of Western Odisha have rich culture and tradition with unique life style and custom. Western Odisha play a unique prominent place in the country due to her cultural element. But due to modernisation and urbanisation, the tribal people face cultural crises various welfare measures initiated by the government have resulted in exposing the tribal more and to outside contact. Industrialisation and urbanisation has devastated the live and culture of tribes. For that reason, the conservation of traditional tribal culture is all the more urgent and crucial.

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